

**The International School for Holocaust Studies**

Internet Department

**Between The Worlds: Social Circles in the Theresienstadt Ghetto**

Welcome! In this website, "Between The Worlds", we invite you to join us on a journey to discover the world of the Jewish children of the Theresienstadt ghetto. This journey strives to reveal the difficulties of these children as they suffered times of pain and loss during the Holocaust. The site has a lesson plan with activities geared for pupils in middle and high school.

This website is based on some of the sources and activities that are part of the CD ROM **'Between the Worlds'- Social Circles in the Theresienstadt Ghetto.'** The CD ROM follows the world of the Jews in the ghetto during this difficult period, and focusing on the various age groups and sub-cultures that lived in the ghetto: children, parents, men and women.

**Lesson Plan**

This activity focuses on the lives and world of the children in the Theresienstadt Ghetto and follows their relationships with different groups in the ghetto:

Introduction

1. The world between parents and their children
2. The world of the children
3. The world between madrichim (youth leaders) and the children

Summary

In each chapter there are relevant testimonies of the children that focus on their fears and feelings.

**Introduction**

During the Holocaust, the Jews of Czechoslovakia as well as elderly Jews and well-known Jewish personalities people from Germany and Western Europe were imprisoned in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Later, in 1944, the Germans also used this ghetto as a site for camouflaging the murder of the Jews of Europe by presenting it as "a model Jewish town" with "an autonomous Jewish administration".

In 1944, the Germans presented the ghetto to an investigating committee of the International Red Cross. Prior to the arrival of the delegation, many Jews were deported to Auschwitz, in order to make the ghetto appear less crowded than it actually was. Fake stores, cafes, kindergartens, and a bank were opened, and little gardens and flowers were planted throughout the ghetto. The visit was meticulously planned in advance, particularly the censored meetings of Jewish prisoners with Red Cross representatives. After the visit, a propaganda movie was made about the life of the Jews in the ghetto under the auspices of the Third Reich. At the end of the filming, most of the "actors" were sent to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. This illusion, crafted so carefully by the Germans during the war, has also carried over since the war. .

Theresienstadt is sometimes - and mistakenly - thought to be a "model" ghetto in which life was, overall, better (than in other ghettos). It is important to understand that death was constantly present in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Most of the elderly people who were brought there died in the ghetto from the inhumane conditions, and it served mainly as a transit station en route to the death camps. On May 9, 1945, the Red Army liberated Theresienstadt. At the time of liberation there were about 30,000 Jews in Theresienstadt. The majority of them were

## The International School for Holocaust Studies

### Internet Department

former concentration camp prisoners that were brought to Theresienstadt on the infamous death marches. Altogether, 155,650 Jews were deported to Theresienstadt. 34,000 of them died there. 87,000 of them were sent to camps in Poland, where the vast majority were murdered by the Germans. Only some 3,000 of the Jews from Theresienstadt survived the camps.

### **Part A: The World Between Parents and Their Children in Theresienstadt**

The Theresienstadt ghetto was established in the area of a fortress that had once served as the living quarters for the Czech army.

The deportations of the Jews to Theresienstadt created terrible over crowding. The men were separated from the women, and they lived in different barracks. This caused a situation wherein most families did not live together. In order to make the conditions better for the children, the Jewish leadership initiated the movement of some of the children to special homes (heim). These homes were established in public buildings. In the heim the children were educated, were able to receive better food rations than the adults, and, for many hours of the day were under the direct supervision of the madrichim. This is why many of the parents preferred that the children live in the heims without them. These conditions created a unique atmosphere.

How did these conditions impact on the relationships between the children and those surrounding them?

#### **Opening question:**

Think of the surroundings that you are familiar with: What elements are essential for a normal, healthy childhood?

#### **For the Teacher**

Parents play a crucial role in the formation of their children's identity and destiny. They mold the children's self-image, recognize their individual aspirations and instill in them the values that will guide their children's lives. The relations between parents and children are based on closeness and mutual dependence. The children need the parent to provide all of their basic needs - food, shelter, and unconditional love, and the parents need their children to give their own lives a purpose and continuity. The children's growth and the stability of their inner world depend to a large extent on the parents' ability to fulfill this role.

#### **Activity:**

Read the following sources and watch the testimony on video. When you are finished, you can discuss the questions in the next paragraph:

#### **Source A**

##### **On the humiliation of the parents in the eyes of their children, Mordechai Ansbacher relates:**

"My mother contracted dysentery and became weaker every day [...] one evening I came from the heim to talk to her. I saw that she was no longer speaking. She was just staring. I said to her: "Mother, here I am, I want to talk to you", and she said: "No, my child, there's no need." I saw that she was very soiled, I mean her body, and I couldn't do anything or be of any help. There was no nurse, and I walked left through the house [...] my mother kept asking for water [...] With great difficulty I obtained a drop of water and gave it to her. She kept on saying: "I can't go on anymore [...]" I did what children don't usually do. I cleaned her and threw away the rags. I told her: "I will not leave you under any circumstances; we will live together."

Keren, **Fragments of Childhood**, (Heb.), p. 60.

The International School for Holocaust Studies  
Internet Department

## Source B

### On the living conditions of the parents Eli Bechner relates:

"I remember my mother worked as a cleaning lady in L417 and slept in the barracks at night. When I used to come to visit her in her free time, I didn't feel comfortable. It was an enormous hall in which 100-120 women lived. When I came, I couldn't knock on the door for permission to enter. More than once I entered and a woman was undressing or lying on her bed, and it was not pleasant for me. I was embarrassed. So I would ask someone to call her outside and we would get together there."

Keren, **Fragments of Childhood**, (Heb.), p. 59.

### Video Testimony: Eva Erben about the loss of childhood:

"...And then, we right home by train for Terezin. The train did not actually reach the ghetto. It stopped about four kilometers from it. Each person had to take his suitcase and walk through the knee-deep snow. There were little children, there were crying children, there were children my age who suddenly stopped being children. And in the blink of an eye; childhood had ended. Who was supposed to help? The parents? With a suitcase in each hand? Worried, and helpless?"

### Questions for Discussion:

- Did the children's separate housing from their parents change the nature of the relationship between parents and children (distance, closeness, undermining authority, and so on)?
- What dilemmas arise in the preceding texts? How can the children and their parents resolve the dilemmas? Which dilemmas cannot be resolved?

Often, one of the serious crises that occurred during the Holocaust was the loss of the parents' ability to protect their children and create a healthy living environment for them. They were deprived of the experience of parenthood. In this reality, the child was required to create a world for himself/herself that balanced the reality that was imposed on him/her, the limited ability of his/hers parents to help him/her, and his/her own capabilities to cope with the challenges. The parents were more often than not helpless and unable to alleviate their children's hardships. This shook up the balance in the relationship between parents and children.

## How did the children deal with daily life in the ghetto?

### For the Teacher

The separation from their parents forced the children to become responsible and independent. In the barracks, the madrichim played a very important role in the children's lives, while the parents were forced aside. In addition, the parents were deprived of their basic right to bring up their children with a sense of their values and to impart their world-view to them. Parents frequently stood by helplessly watching the ways in which their children were forced to grow up because of their harsh living conditions such as epidemics, disease, and humiliation. If that was not enough, the deportation train left the ghetto every week, instilling terror in the hearts of the few who remained. Sometimes the members of a family were separated and sent alone to their deaths in the camps.

## Part B: The World of Children in Theresienstadt

By reading the children's newspapers, we can learn about the way that the children dealt with daily life in the ghetto. In Theresienstadt, a number of newspapers were published, amongst

## The International School for Holocaust Studies

### Internet Department

them Vedem and Kamarad.

The Kamarad ("Comrade") periodical was published in Q609, the children's barrack shared by Czech and German speaking boys and girls. The 22 bulletins of Kamarad were written by children in their childish handwriting, and illustrated by the editor, Ivan Polak, without the assistance of the madrichim. The objective of Kamarad, like other children's periodicals, was to entertain, provide reading materials, and impart knowledge.

#### **Activity:**

Read the following sources and watch the testimony on video:

When you are finished, you can discuss the questions in the next paragraph:

#### **Source A - Pischkollonne**

What is a Pischkollonne? It originates from a Greek word, pisch, meaning "to run", "ko", meaning "trousers", and "lona", meaning "wet" [the actual meaning is pischen, which means "to urinate" in German slang, and Kollonne, which means a line of soldiers]. There are three different types of Pischkollonne: daytime, evening, and night.

1. A daytime Pischkollonne: this is completely ordinary and mainly occurs alone... The morning Pischkollonne is already more interesting, but it actually belongs more to the nocturnal Pischkollonne about which we will speak later...
2. The evening Pischkollonne is announced after the detective stories, at about 10 o'clock, and the entire heim goes out to take part in it, with only the lazy ones staying in their beds and either waking up at night with wet pants or running throughout the whole night.
3. Night Pischkollonne. You wake up. It's a dark night. You need to go urgently, so you pull off the warm blanket and look for the ladder. If something falls on your head, you realize that you have to crawl along a different path, and when you finally feel the ladder, you go down. Perhaps, if you're lucky, you manage to leave the room alive and only partially disabled. When you reach the toilet, you realize with horror that it's locked. You walk, no, you run in the dark to the second toilet next to the washroom. It may be a bit flooded, but you don't care. Suddenly Pepa Kremer, Jerka Frankl or some other madrich pops up from behind the corner of the balcony, and you've already got Heiselturna [toilet duty]. Since you have to go to the toilet no matter what, you decide to go out to the yard. It is a difficult path, full of the unknown... and I'll describe it in the next bulletin. I therefore advise you to buy a subscription to the next issue of Kamarad, otherwise you may not be able to get hold of it. Bondy, **"They Called It Friend"**, p. 75-76.

#### **Source B - The fun corner**

The country which manufactures the most cars: Russia-USA-UK  
Napoleon died in: alba-St. Helen- Medira  
The St Martenik Island belongs to: UK-Portugal-France  
Titian was: Author- Poet- Artist  
Ontario is : Lake- City-Swamp  
Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 89.

#### **First part**

- 1) List the names of 20 large cities that begin with the letters A or B.
- 2) List 10 rivers in North America.
- 3) List 10 famous people whose names begin with the letter M.
- 4) List 5 well-known operas and their composers.
- 5) List all the artists and sculptors that you know.

**The International School for Holocaust Studies**

**Internet Department**

Hand in your answers to the editorial board by March 2nd. Answer honestly without using an atlas. The correct answers will be published in the next issue and will win a prize.

Yours,

Zgabanina [editor Ivan Polak's nickname]

**Source C - The Deportations**

"The transport [September 6, 1943] came all of a sudden, like lightning. It took about twenty of our boys, among them some of the best in the home. But nothing could be done about it. Evening came, the time when the announcements about who was to be on the next transport were supposed to be given. We all waited anxiously for Hunza Jochovitz, who was the one who received the notices. The first group that was announced included many boys. In the second group, which came later on in the evening, there were already fewer boys. We went to bed upset, because the summons for the reserves were supposed to come the next morning. And indeed they came. Throughout the morning, the boys that were to be on the next transport packed and we helped them.

The day arrived where they had to report to the station. Some of them presented themselves at Q319, others at Hamburg [barracks], at L417 and at Dresden [barracks]. Panic reigned throughout the city. Finally everybody was in place.

...The first evening without our friends; every word echoes through the home in such a strange and haunting way."

Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 28.

**Source D - Advertisement and Announcements!**

I will exchange a beautiful doll for a helping of hasa (chopped meat mixed with flour and water). Contact: Filth Above Everything! (Nickname)

**Clause 1:** It is forbidden to respond to the sentences such as "Who will go to the children's kitchen?" etc. with answers such as: "He's a donkey". Anyone who does not obey these instructions will get a slap from someone present in the room.

**Clause 2:** There must be silence by 21:00, so that the "sleepies" can get some sleep. He who disobeys this rule will be turned over to the madrich(counselor) Blayer.

**Clause 3:** Everyone wants the monitor on duty to finish on time, so everyone must get up at 7 o'clock

**Source E - Sport**

The ninth round in the Terezin league

A.Z.\*-HaGibor Prague 4:2

Prague-Vienna 6:1

Jugendfirzorga- HaGibor Terezin 14:1

This competition took place on Wednesday and was more of a comedy than a game. J.F. [Jugendfirzorga] had a great advantage and all of their players except Brada and Meyer scored goals. Although Brada played aggressively, he did not score a goal, and Meyer missed a penalty kick. J.F. played well (it wasn't difficult). I won't speak about H.T. [HaGibor Terezin]

\*The name of a Jewish sport organization in Czechoslovakia that was very successful in different areas of sport and was on an Olympic level in swimming.

Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 67

The two sports pages featured a description of the game between the cooks and the work

---

## The International School for Holocaust Studies

### Internet Department

center (7:1), the results of the tenth round in the Terezin League, after 10 games: In first place are the cooks, in second place the clothing warehouse workers - both teams with 9 victories each - in 11th place HaGibor Terezin, and in the last place Vienna. Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 72

On January 26 they declared a ping pong competition in our heim. The barrack was divided into a league and into Group A and Group B. The entire heim participated in this competition. The first round was decided through a lottery:

League  
Han Pollack  
Shulhof-  
Bak-Mautner

Group A  
Klein-Pik  
Y Gross-  
Freund-Kurtz

Group B  
Viner-Beihabi  
P Gross- Gruta  
T Gancz- Y  
Gancz  
Levi- Shmurel  
Schwartz-  
Sternitz

In the next edition, we will inform you of the results. Hurrah for sports!

Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 115.

### Source F - The Deportations

We remember...

A year has already gone by since many of our friends from the Hanover barrack were forced to leave. Perhaps you remember the boys who would still be among us if it weren't for fate that carried them off far away from us. A whole year has already passed since they left the home and disappeared from our sight, but they will never disappear from our hearts, never! Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 140.

#### Video Testimony: Yehuda Bacon about the Deportations to the East:

"What characterized both the younger and older children, was the fear of transports. Every now and then there was suddenly a curfew, going out was prohibited, or a new transport arrived, or suddenly they called out names, and friends from our barracks were sent to the East. That was always a sad thing, and it's difficult to explain the fear, the insecurity, of who'll go next time, who'll stay, and the sadness we felt when our barracks were half empty or lacking our best friends. The goodbyes were very difficult."

#### Questions for discussion:

- Is there a connection between the historical reality (As we explained in the introduction-note the time line and the number of "deportations" indicated on it, especially in 1942) and the important topics in the periodical?
- Is there a feeling of terror and pending disaster? How can this be explained?

How did these conditions impact on the relationships between the children and those surrounding them?

## The International School for Holocaust Studies

### Internet Department

#### For the teacher

The periodical *Kamarad* is an example of the creativity and independence of the children during the Holocaust and their ability to express themselves in different areas. By reading the periodical we can learn about how the children lived in the ghetto, what interests they had, what was important to them, and what role imagination and humor had even in those difficult times?

We have learnt a little about the knowledge and understanding that the children had regarding the reality in which they lived, and the tools they used in order to deal with the reality surrounding them. The reality of the children's life was influenced, to a large extent, by the fact that they lived in heims under the supervision of the youth leaders.

#### Part C: The World between Madrichim and Children in Theresienstadt

In the barracks the children lived under the authority of the leaders. How much was this framework able to serve as a substitute for the family unit and which jobs did the leaders take upon themselves? We will study this through the eyes of the children and the way in which they expressed themselves as they described their leaders

#### Activity:

Read the next 3 sources. Afterwards, fill out the graph.

#### Source A - The Czech Girls' Home

"Today is Mother's Day. The girls have been so excited about making presents for their mothers. I felt terribly strange. My parents are in Palestine. I thought that on this special day, I should give a present to the person who I feel is almost like my mother, and that is exactly how I feel about Mrs. Milstein and Tela. For a year and a half, they have looked after me like mothers, why shouldn't I repay them? I want to be like them. I have prepared little presents for them. I had a strange feeling when I saw Mrs. Milstein sitting at the table! I approached her slowly, and finally gave her the present, adding a sweet kiss, and ran away. I saw that she was surprised and pleased. I was a hundred times happier than she was. I went to Tela, trembling all over. I wished her well and began to cry. Suddenly I felt so good. I will never be able to forget Mother's Day in Theresienstadt."

R.S., 13 years old, heim 28

In *Their Footsteps - A Visitor's Guide to Terezin*, (Heb.), p. 13.

#### Source B - Jewish Education in the Ghetto

March 17, 1942

"In the evening, there was a talk with the female counselors. I lectured for almost a full hour, but the counselors were so tired, they did not pay the kind of attention to the lecture that I usually require. I wanted to start a debate on Jewish education but failed. I hope I will succeed next time. What do you tell a child that steals coal? The child sees everyone stealing and loses all sense of morality."

Redlich, *The Theresienstadt Diary of Gonda Redlich*, p. 28.

#### Source C - The Betreuers\*

Issue No. 2, November 5, 1943

I'm thinking about what to write and all of a sudden an idea pops into my mind. I'll tell you all about the madrichim - the Betreuers\*. The central figure in our Home is Georg Frankl. He is very strict with us. But he is able to get us anything we need, from an alarm clock to closets. As it turns out, he hates dirt. On November 1, at ten minutes past eight, a moment arrived that everyone will always remember. The mess was supposed to be tidied up in five minutes. I



**The International School for Holocaust Studies**

**Internet Department**

won't say any more about [the madrich] Jerka, and I'll go on to Rita. Tidiness and other things are taken care of by the Betreuers, one of whom is Rita. Like most women, she rules moderately and in that she is not exceptional. Nu, and now it's Pepa's turn; he is all over the place and stays in each place for just a minute. The ladies Drarova and Flosrova are responsible for the cooking. The manager of the Pischkollonne is Aunt Annie, whose broom we took, but when she said that she wouldn't make Ordnung [order], we gave it back to her voluntarily. See you in the next bulletin.  
Midalias.

\*The caretakers. The educators were called madrichim and the caretakers were called Betreuers. Bondy, **They Called It Friend**, (Heb.), p. 70.

In Column A, write the name of the madrich or madricha whom the text refers to. In Column B, indicate which figure, in your opinion, they are replacing: a father, a mother, a grandfather, a brother, disciplinarians, storytellers, friends or teacher etc. In Column C, indicate whether, in your opinion, the madrichim succeeded in providing the child with a sense of the figure they were replacing.

The madrich or madricha (name if there is one)	The figure that the madrich or madricha is replacing	Does the madrich or madricha provide a sense of the missing figure?

**Summary...**

**For the teacher**

In Theresienstadt many children lived together in their own barracks. The spirit of the youth movements served as a basis for the life in the barracks. In these barracks, the children were under the authority of their leaders, who, in many cases, were only a few years older than the children. The Zionist ideology assumed a central position in these frameworks. The Zionist madrichim worked on promoting Zionist and pioneering values to the children. This world-view was foreign to many of them since they came from assimilated homes. Nevertheless, other ideological groups - political and religious - were active, reflecting various sectors of Czech Jewry and other groups in the ghetto. The need to protect the children from the difficult reality in the ghetto led the Jewish leadership to separate the children from their parents. By doing so, they created an alternative to family life. The madrichim were responsible for the daily routine and the activities in the children's homes. Moreover, since the family framework had largely been dismantled, intimate emotions such as love, anger, and dependence, which had formerly been directed at the parents, were now directed at the madrichim.



**The International School for Holocaust Studies**

Internet Department

**For the Teacher**

A substitute figure can often try to take the place of the person who is absent. Sometimes he/she can console and give hope, but he/she can never be that person. In fact, he/she often intensifies the pain created by the absence of the person.

**Summary**

Theresienstadt was not a ghetto in the ordinary sense of the word. It served as both ghetto and transit camp from which thousands were deported to concentration and extermination camps. Men, women and children were forced to deal with a daily reality of life in the shadow of death. They tried to keep the family framework despite the separation between the members of the family. They were forced to fight in order to get a bit of food, and in order to protect their privacy and preserve their humanity. The actual life in Theresienstadt, and not what the Nazis falsely presented, becomes more clear through reading the testimonies and stories of the children of Theresienstadt. The voice of the children shows us about how this place served as a source of life and hope alongside the pain, the loss and death. Out of the 15,000 children that were in Theresienstadt, about 150 survived.

In these activities you read a variety of testimonies from the Theresienstadt ghetto that tell the story of the children in the Ghetto.

**Yehuda Bacon describes through his dream the incredible distance between the home before the war, Theresienstadt, and Auschwitz:**

"In Theresienstadt we dreamed ....I dreamt that I was back home, I dreamt that I would meet friends from class .... When we came to Auschwitz, we never dreamed about home anymore. The biggest dream was Theresienstadt".